

A  
L E T T E R  
F R O M A N  
A M E R I C A N,  
Now resident in L O N D O N,  
T O A  
M E M B E R O F P A R L I A M E N T,  
On the Subject of the  
R E S T R A I N I N G P R O C L A M A T I O N;  
A N D C O N T A I N I N G  
S T R I C T U R E S  
O N  
L O R D S H E F F I E L D ' s P A M P H L E T,  
O N T H E  
C O M M E R C E  
O F T H E  
A M E R I C A N S T A T E S.

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Said to be written by WILLIAM BINGHAM, Esquire;  
late Agent for the CONGRESS of the UNITED STATES  
of AMERICA, at *Martinico*.

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To which are added,  
M E N T O R ' s R E P L Y t o P H O C I O N ' s L E T T E R;  
with some O B S E R V A T I O N S o n T R A D E,  
addressed to the Citizens of N E W - Y O R K.

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P H I L A D E L P H I A:

P R I N T E D a n d S O L D B Y R O B E R T B E L L, i n T h i r d - S t r e e t,  
M, D C C, L X X I V.

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A  
L E T T E R  
F R O M A N  
A M E R I C A N,  
C O N T A I N I N G  
S T R I C T U R E S O N  
C O M M E R C E.

SIR,

**T**H E secession of so considerable a part of the British Empire, as now constitutes the United States, and the general acknowledgement of their independence by the powers of Europe, must point out a very important æra in the history of mankind.

The causes that led to this great revolution, and the operations that insured its success, will hereafter afford abundant matter for the pen of some able historian.

The immediate effects that it must have on the System of European Politics, form a very serious subject of present enquiry and contemplation; especially, as nations begin to be convinced of the futility of becoming great by conquest, and more inclined to abandon the cruel system of war, in order effectually to enrich themselves by pursuing the peaceful line of commerce.

The United States, stretching through such a variety of climates, abounding in such various productions, and affording such a vast field for the consumption of European manufactures, must naturally have a very intimate and active commerce with the different States of Europe.

From adventitious circumstances, peculiarly favorable to Great Britain, no nation possesses opportunities of so effectually promoting this connection; and from her dependence on commerce, for the support of her power and importance, no nation is so pointedly interested in the improvement of these advantages.

She has already brought her affairs to the brink of ruin, from continuing too long a slave to imposture and delusion. It is time to recover her from her lethargy; this perhaps may prove a difficult



# STRICTURES ON COMMERCE

cult task, as ignorant and interested writers are still endeavouring to impose their ill-digested and pernicious systems on the public mind, and to impress sentiments, which, if adopted into the politics of this country, would be entirely subversive of a commercial connection betwixt Great Britain and the United States of America.

I shall submit my opinions on this subject, to your consideration, and have little doubt of a coincidence of sentiment.

You must remember that after the conclusion of the war, a Bill was introduced into the House of Commons, by Mr. Pitt, (then Chancellor of the Exchequer) in order to serve as a temporary regulation for the trade of the United States. In perfect conformity with the spirit of this Bill, it was expected a permanent connection betwixt the two Countries, would be formed by treaty; it had in view a system of liberal intercourse, and was received in America with universal approbation, as the harbinger of returning affections.

Under a firm persuasion that Great Britain would persevere in the line of conduct, that this Bill prescribed, the United States opened all their ports to British shipping, and received them, without any other restrictions than those, which vessels belonging to their own citizens, were exposed to.

A change of ministry soon after took place, and likewise a change of measures; the advocates for the American war composed a part of it; the effects were soon visible; a Proclamation, virtually restraining all intercourse betwixt the United States and the West Indies, except in British shipping, made its appearance.

This measure was in every respect impolitic and unwise, as it was natural to imagine that it would make unfavourable impressions in regard to the views of Great Britain, that would remain long, and affect deeply; and would have a tendency to convince the United States that the same system of insatuated councils, that severed the two countries asunder, still had an ascendancy in the British Cabinet, and was likely to continue an insuperable barrier to a free and unrestrained connection.

Much about the same time Lord Sheffield published a pamphlet, which was intended to justify the prudent precaution of such measures, as essentially necessary to the future wealth and power of Great Britain; it is said to have had a very serious effect on the minds of the people in England, the majority of whom, as in all countries, are more prone to receive the opinions of others, than be at the trouble of furnishing arguments for themselves.

However, it will not be difficult to prove, that his reasoning is extremely flimsy and fallacious; entirely remote from the principles of commercial legislation, and supported on a system of acknowledged error.

Previous to entering on a refutation of his doctrine, it will be necessary to premise some few reflections, on the advantages that the

the West India Islands will derive, from being indulged in an intercourse with the United States, from which the adoption of Lord Sheffield's system would entirely exclude them.

The soil, the climate, and consequently the productions of the United States, are so various, that they can furnish almost every article that they can furnish almost every article that the wants and conveniences of the islands can require; and from circumstances of local situation, can supply them more abundantly, more expeditiously on better terms, and less subject to contingencies, than they can be procured from Europe; insomuch, that the West India Planters have always regarded a commercial connection with the United States as essential to the well-being and improvement of the islands, and have deprecated the loss of it, as a most fatal blow to their flourishing existence.

The articles which the Colonist indispensably stands in need of, are flour, biscuit, Indian corn, rice, beans, peas, potatoes, salt beef, pork, cheese, butter, beer, cod and other kinds of salt fish, whale oil, candles, tallow, soap, tobacco, naval stores, horses, poultry, live cattle, bar iron, building wood of all kinds, frames of houses, masts, spars, hoghead staves, heading, shingles, plank both pine and oak, &c.

The United States can, not only abundantly, and at all times, supply these articles, but can furnish them on far more moderate terms, than they can be imported from Europe.

Experience has proved, that no food is so cheap and nourishing to the slaves as Indian corn, of which there must necessarily be a regular and frequent supply, as it will not keep but a short time, exposed to the extreme warmth of the climate. Small vessels are generally employed in furnishing these supplies, as well as live stock and other articles of provisions, which could not afford to navigate with cargoes of such little value if it was not for the quickness of the voyage, and the certainty of a return freight of West India produce. These are not objects of sufficient importance for European vessels; for large quantities would frequently overstock the market, and consequently be exposed to perish in the hands of the importer.

But there are particular times when the dependence of the West Indies on the United States, is more pointedly observable. After a hurricane, that awful and tremendous convulsion of nature, that so frequently happens in the tropical climates, that levels with the ground all the buildings and improvements of a plantation, destroys the provisions, and exhibits throughout the whole country, the wildest marks of ruin and devastation: Where is the affrighted planter to look for succour and assistance? How is he to repair his losses, promptly and effectually?

He must give himself up to despair, if his only reliance is on European supplies: but he feels a consolation when he considers his vicinity to America, which, though but a foster mother, acting like a natural parent, flies to his relief,



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After these terrible calamities, which have threatened all the miseries of famine, he has often found, from experience, that she has poured in such abundance, as to have reduced the prices of provisions, much lower than they even were previous to his misfortunes.

The advantages which this commerce presents are founded on the broad basis of reciprocal interests, and a mutual exchange of necessary commodities.

The United States, in return for the supplies they furnish the islands, will receive their productions, several of which, such as rum and molasses, may be called the excrescences of their exports, and without recourse to American consumption, would be in very feeble demand for the European market.

But should no encouragement be given to the planter, to aid the natural vigour of the soil, by the facility with which he may procure his provisions; and should the islands be deprived of the advantages which their local situation affords, by having the channel through which their supplies are to be procured, stopped up, or confined in too narrow bounds, they will not only individually suffer, by being often exposed to a calamitous scarcity; but the Mother Country must finally be sensible of the pernicious effects of such restrictions. For the body politic, like the human body, has a sense of feeling, in its remotest extremities. Nothing suffers singly by itself—there “is a consent of the parts in the system of both, and the “partial evil grows into universal mischief” For in an exact ratio, with the rate of provisions, and other necessities of life will the demand for labour keep pace, and the price of West India produce, and its relative quantity, will rise or fall by these proportions. The planter consequently cannot afford his productions so low, as to be placed in competition with the French at a foreign market, except he procures his necessities on the best of terms.

On the contrary, should the islands flourish under a State of ease and plenty, the Mother Country will be proportionably benefited; for it is an invariable rule in commercial polity, that riches always centre in the Metropolis: their diffusive influence may be compared to the circulation of the blood, which is dispersed over the whole system, but always returns back to the heart, the seat of life, and is only sent back by new pulsations.

Should therefore this monopolizing spirit which is a mockery on the industry of a country, give way to more liberal ideas, the active stimulus of the planter will no longer be depressed. By being furnished with necessities on more moderate and easy terms, he will employ less of his revenue, to defray the expences of his estate; he will consequently have a residue left to appropriate to the the extension of his settlements, clearing and breaking up new grounds, which when brought into culture, will furnish additional quantities of produce, to supply the increasing demand.

In the course of attaining these profits to the planter, the State will greatly benefit in an increase of her revenues, by the duties  
laid

laid on the surplus quantity of produce : by the employment of a more extensive commerce and navigation, which must keep pace with the improving condition of her islands : and by fixing the balance of trade in her favour in proportion to the augmentation of her exports.

Another advantage of conspicuous character offers itself ; which is their increasing consumption of manufactures, which improving establishments naturally occasion ; and an increase of manufactures is always accompanied by a proportional increase of population.

Moulded by habit to a particular mode of thinking in regard to the commercial legislation of the islands, I know it will be difficult, and will require every effort of sound reasoning, to break through the system of prohibitory laws, established by the British Government. But, when an increase of population and of revenue, progressive opulence and strength, are to be derived from the effects of abandoning this jealous self-obstructing policy ; it is to be expected that the spirit of such contracted establishments will not be inveterate, and on mature consideration, will no longer be adhered to.

But it is asserted by Lord Sheffield, that regular supplies of provisions and necessaries may, with proper encouragement, be obtained from the remainder of the British Colonies on the continent.

These visionary suggestions are almost too ludicrous to be combated, and seem intended as a political artifice, to blind the eyes of the too credulous people, and deceive them into a belief, that their remaining territories in America are of considerable value.

It is well known, that the intenseness of the climate of Canada, with the difficulty of its navigation will scarcely admit of more than one voyage in the year to the West Indies, which require a regular and continued supply of provisions.

As for the inhospitable regions of Nova Scotia, it will be matter of wonder, and a solace to humanity, if by the unceasing industry of its inhabitants, it will be able to produce a sufficiency, for their sustenance and support.

The United States must therefore continue to be, what they always have been, the granary of the British West Indies ; and if direct importations into them are not admitted of, recourse will be had to indirect supplies, through the medium of the neutral islands. All the additional expence of this circuitous route, incurred for charges of double insurance, freight, commission, &c. will fall on the Colonist, as the consumer, without very materially injuring the American merchant, who will naturally insure to himself a saving profit on his exports.

Besides, the British Government must establish a number of guarda costas, well armed and appointed, to prevent the clandestine trade that will immediately commence betwixt the United States and their islands. A trade, that will find a support and protection, in every planter of the country, whose interest will be so immediately connected with its encouragement, will not easily be suppressed.

Even



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Even under the vigorous authority of military government in the French West Indies, not all the weight of power, exerted for the purpose, could formerly prevent this species of traffic; much less can it be expected to succeed, where the reigns of government are relatively so relaxed, as in the hands of the British Governors.

Besides, Great Britain has learned, by fatal dear-bought experience, impressed in such strong characters, as not to be soon and easily effaced, that "the true art of governing is not to govern too much;" and how difficult it is to rule a people by laws, that it is their interest to resist, and render nugatory.

But to counteract the force of the foregoing observations, it is asserted by Lord Sheffield, and what is much more strange, that people are so infatuated as to believe, that notwithstanding the absolute prohibition on the part of Great Britain, of admission of American vessels into her islands, still that the United States will open their ports to British shipping, and freely indulge them with the liberty of carrying off their produce.

But he must have a poor opinion of the force of his own arguments, which he has so abundantly furnished to Great Britain, in favour of this selfish system of monopolizing the carrying trade, if he does not believe, that they will operate so effectually on the minds of the Americans, as to induce them, deprived of an equalization of privilege, to adopt the same plan; admitting that their sagacious clear-sighted politicians had not already discovered them.

His premises therefore are not admissible — the idea they convey is an insult on common sense.

I expected, that in forming an estimate of the American character, the English had been fully persuaded, from a view of the progress of their political affairs, that they were conducted by a people who seldom have so widely wandered from their interests.

Habituated to the resistance of every oppressive measure, more vigilant over their national concerns, more intent on connecting the science of politics, with the elements of commerce, as forming the most important object of the statesman's attention — than perhaps any other nation existing, is it to be expected, they will acquiesce in a system, so derogatory to the honour, degrading to the spirit, and injurious to the interests of a great people?

A moment's reflection must convince every dispassionate enquirer, that our legislators are better guardians of the public concerns, than to submit to so pernicious an intercourse; especially, when it is considered, that they are selected from those, who are the best versed in the interests of the States, as relative to those of other commercial powers, and who will embrace every advantage that nature has given, or art can procure, to the improvement thereof.

He may continue to cherish the delusive idea, but I will tell him in prophetic language, what will be the consequence.

The States from a sense of common danger, and common interest, will more closely unite together, and form one general system

system of exclusive navigation, in regard to Great Britain, established on clear, equal and determinate principles of commercial retaliation, which will rapidly pervade the whole Union. Already has a generous competition began to take place, betwixt them, which shall most cheerfully adopt, and carry into effect, those wise and salutary measures, recommended by the grand council of the country, in order to make their federal union respectable, and the United States, as prosperous in Peace, as they have been glorious in War.

I acknowledge, that such public spirited arrangements will, for a time, expose some of the States, to temporary inconvenience and distress; but after all the sacrifices they have already made, will it be surprizing that they should exert this self-denying virtue; especially as it will eventually become one of the greatest sources of their future wealth and importance.

Such prohibitions, therefore, on the part of Great Britain, will operate like a charm throughout the country; they will act like a spur on the industry of the inhabitants, and compel them to turn their attention more immediately to the construction of ships, and the increase of their seamen. The eastern and middle States, which from circumstances of local situation and character, are more peculiarly calculated for these purposes, will, by vigorous exertion, by great and increasing encouragement, in a short time, be enabled to furnish a sufficient supply. Many of their trading inhabitants will be induced to reside in, and become citizens of the southern States, and form establishments therein, in order to devote themselves to the business of furnishing the necessary shipping, for the transportation of their bulky produce.

Such circumstances, fortunately combining in favour of the general interest of the republic will operate as a bond of union amongst them by occasioning their respective citizens to continue to mix freely and intimately together.

And by making them mutually dependent on each other for reciprocal services, will divest them of local attachments, and will irresistibly impel them to become friends, to the rights and interests of confederated America. For as the propagation of mankind depends on the intercourse of persons of different sexes, so do political connections thrive only betwixt such countries, as furnish different materials for their mutual exchange, and who soon become, from a sense of each others wants mutually endeared to each other. Yet this shrewd politician infers, that the States will oppose each other, because their staples and their climate are different—forgetting the truth of that political maxim, that interest unites, from the same cause that it divides.

Therefore this selfish arrangement which appears to predominate, in the British Cabinet, and which is supposed to be an emanation from the same ill fated star, which in your political system has been so long looked up to as your polar direction, will eventually become



a great advantage to the United States ; for I am well convinced, that they never will arrive to any eminence as a naval power, until their inhabitants are reduced to the necessity of being the exclusive carriers of their own productions, thereby encouraging mercantile navigation, so as to make it become a nursery of seamen. I say forced, for the assertion of Lord Sheffield, that our vessels navigate cheaper than those of Great Britain, is not founded on fact ; for when their speedy decay, comparatively with those of the British, with the scarcity of seamen, the much higher price of wages, and the necessity of importing most of the building materials from Europe, are taken into consideration, it will clearly be inferred, that the latter can afford their freights, at a much easier rate.

But should the United States be compelled to adopt a navigation act, the prospect will then change, the demands for seamen will greatly increase, their wages will be encouraging, and it will not be possible to prevent their passing into the American service ; for this class of people, as wavering and inconstant as the element that wafts them, are attached to change of climate, and are easily allured by the prospect of greater wages, or kinder treatment.

Under the influence of the above causes it must be clearly evident, that the fears of our competition in the carrying trade of the West Indies, are entirely groundless. Besides, it is not probable that the Americans will seek in foreign countries for freights, when they have not perhaps above one fourth part of the necessary shipping to supply their own demands, for transporting their produce to market : How absurd and contradictory then are Lord Sheffield's apprehensions ! for it is, from a presumption of their scarcity of shipping, that he affirms that the Americans will not refuse their produce to the offers of British vessels ; he acknowledges likewise, that the French undersel the British sugars at foreign markets ; there can consequently be but little danger of the Americans being desirous of carrying them to foreign ports ; for where will be the inducement ?

In arguing against this selfish contracted system, founded on extreme cupidity, and in favour of a free unrestrained commerce betwixt the two countries, I have no view of consulting the advantages of the United States to the exclusion of those of Great Britain.

I know it would be folly to expect that she would make sacrifices of her interests, to accommodate the views of the Americans.

But it so happens, that she cannot favour the United States with an indulgence, for which they are not able to furnish more than a reciprocal benefit.

It is expedient however to examine still more fully, what the grand leading argument that Lord Sheffield adduces in favour of the necessity of totally excluding them from a participation in the British West India trade, amounts to. He is fearful that they will thereby become the carriers of the produce of the islands to the

the place of its consumption, which will create an interference of foreign vessels, thereby lessening the number of seamen, and consequently the naval force of the country.

But, if in addition to all that I have already said, I answer, that in return for this accommodation which he may call indulgent, but which I have clearly evinced to be the interest of Great Britain, consulting the welfare of her islands, to grant.

I say, if in return for this accommodation, her subjects may be admitted to a free ingress and egress to and from the ports of the United States — What reply will the advocates for this system make? — What will become of Lord Sheffield's reasoning, when weighed in the scale of comparative proportion? I only wish them to comprehend the magnitude of the advantage. Men of weak or limited understandings, will be incapable of extending their ideas, so as to embrace the vast field it opens to an enlightened mind.

In the first place, they will not assuredly deny, that the productions of the United States, to the transportation of which, from the proposed arrangement, they are freely to be admitted, will furnish twice the quantity of bulky materials, that the exports of the West Indies do, and will consequently employ twice the quantity of shipping. — To stamp conviction in regard to the truth of this assertion, let them take a view of the rice, indigo, and lumber of Georgia and South Carolina; — the naval stores, lumber, and tobacco of North Carolina; — the tobacco wheat, Indian corn, &c. of Virginia and Maryland; — the flour, lumber corn, and various provisions of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Jersey and New-York; — the fish, lumber, live stock, &c. of the New England States.

Admit this fact to be ascertained with satisfactory precision, will it not be confessed, that an arrangement, by which both countries are freely admitted to a participation of each other's trade, will be highly advantageous to Great Britain.

This is a position, as clear as any mathematical axiom. — Besides, the advantages of Great Britain may be deemed increasing, as the exportation of the bulky produce of the United States, in which her vessels will be employed, will augment, in proportion to the population of the country; — a population, that will probably be productive beyond all examples of former ages, — multiplying like the seeds of the harvest.

Whereas, on her part, there is but little room for extension of improvement; — on this point her most sanguine friends would compound, for her being fixed and stationary.

But Lord Sheffield argues, that it would be folly to grant the Americans any particular privileges and concessions, as the treaties with France, and the United Provinces, in direct terms forbid the British being put on a better footing than the inhabitants of those countries.

The faculties of this writer must be strangely perverted, — or his



his design must evidently be to delude the public mind, by giving so false a construction to this part of the treaties.

Can it be imagined, on the principles of common sense, that if the French and Dutch exclude the Americans from a share of their West India trade, the United States will grant to the inhabitants of those countries, the same free admission into their ports, as to those of Great Britain, who may permit an unrestrained participation in their commerce? In every contract, there is a *quid pro quo* — openly expressed, or tacitly implied; — and it is not to be presumed, that the most favoured nation can require a benefit, without granting a reciprocal return; — it is contrary to the avowed policy of nations, which, it is well understood, is founded on the broad basis, of interest and convenience.

The same reasons will tend to frustrate the hopes of Russia, who cannot, like the United States, give an equitable equivalent to Great Britain, in return for such great concessions.

France has hitherto, invariably, by her own internal resources, supplied her islands abundantly, with many of the necessaries they stand in need of, and is still in a capacity to do the same.

With respect to other articles, (the produce of the United States,) that do not interfere with her own exports, she has given free admission to them all into her West India possessions; — and in order to gain the advantages of the rum trade, which the British hitherto have exclusively proposed, she has ceded particular districts in her islands, for the accommodation of the Americans, who may chuse to erect distilleries thereon, which, for their great encouragement, are to be exempt from taxes, for a certain number of years. — The consummate policy of her councils was never more eminently displayed, than in this measure.

*See Proclamation of the General of Martinico, published in the Public Advertiser.*

The astonished planter, in viewing the respective arrangements of the two countries, will wonder where the genius of Britain, so famed for her commercial knowledge, has retired.

After having already made it appear that it is the interest of Great Britain (independent of all other considerations) to adopt the plan of an open communication between the islands and the United States, and that it is in the power of the latter to grant more than they receive; — I will now have recourse to an argument, that perhaps will have a salutary effect on those, who are the most difficult to be persuaded; — I mean, the relative situation of the two countries, which makes it the interest of Great Britain, more than that of any other European power, to be pointedly connected with the American States.

Let a moment's attention be paid to this subject, and let the inference be fairly and dispassionately drawn.

Great Britain, by the superior skill and industry of her inhabitants

tants, and some adventitious circumstances, has carried many of her manufactures to a degree of perfection and cheapness, which no other country in Europe has arrived at.

Considering the inferior state of her population, compared with some of her rival nations, and the very limited extent of her territory, it must be confessed, that a considerable part of her revenues, to support the immense load of debt she has incurred, must be drawn from this source — from the industry of her people.

The United States at present offer three millions of inhabitants, rapidly increasing in numbers, all of whom consume more or less of British manufactures, — the productions of art and industry, — in return for which, they give the raw materials — the produce of agriculture, in their native state.

How infatuated must the councils of your country be, which could tend but for a moment, to disturb so beneficial an intercourse; or suspend the sweets of so lucrative a commerce!

The United States have as yet laid no impositions on the importation of British manufactures, that can have any tendency to restrain the consumption of them; — and many reasons of conspicuous weight and importance continually offer, in favour of establishing such duties; — for by operating as a sumptuary law, such a measure would be of considerable service to a young country by repressing the desire of foreign luxuries, which have already been poured into America, in such abundance, that the States begin to suffer, from not having sufficient produce to remit in payment; — which turns the balance of trade greatly against them. — Besides, such restrictions wisely imposed, tend to stimulate and encourage a spirit of industry amongst the people, to aim at similar improvements. — *December 16th. 1783.*

But should the impolitic conduct of Great Britain precipitate the adoption of this measure by the respective States, where are her growing resources to counteract the effects of this failure of internal industry? — for it is universally agreed, that no country is more dependent on foreign demand, for the superfluous produce of art and industry; — and that the luxury and extravagance of her inhabitants, have already advanced to the ultimate point of abuse, and cannot be so increased, as to augment the home consumption, in proportion to the decrease that will take place on a diminution of foreign trade.

What then will become of all those useful hands, that were employed in supplying the great demand?

Recollect the cries of suffering thousands, at the time of the non-importation agreement; — these people, in their own defence, will emigrate to America.

Such a system of conduct persevered in, will operate in favour of the United States, as effectually, as the revocation of the edict of Nantes did in behalf of the protestant countries of Europe — by holding up America, as the most desirable refuge for the property, arts, and manufactures of Great Britain to retire to; —

a country



a country, where civil and religious liberty are upheld in all their purity,— where, by the exertion of a few years of honest industry, an emigrant is morally sure, of being furnished with the means of becoming an independent freeholder ;— a country, that has laid no impolitic restraints on naturalization ;— whose yoke is easy, and whose burthen's light ; and which indulgently holds out its arms for the reception of the weary and heavy laden of all nations ; and which, notwithstanding the attempts of Great Britain to enslave it, would generously offer an asylum for her persecuted sons, who impressed with a sense of gratitude, “ may blush ” to think their fathers were its foes. ”

But Lord Sheffield exultingly advances, that the Americans cannot forego the British manufactures ;—— and that so far from the necessity of courting their custom, not all the interdicts of Congress, and of the several States, during the war, could prevent their consumption.

To deduce important inferences, from such faulty premises, would be “ leaning on a broken reed. ” There may be at present some partiality in the States, for British manufactures ;—— yet this predilection arises from cradle prejudices, and has greatly decreased during the war ;— and it would be unwise in Great Britain to place any reliance on a continuation of it :— for the manufactures of other countries, if equally good, and afforded cheaper, will, by a continued competition, be eventually preferred ; especially, as there will be a constant succession of emigrants from different parts of Europe, who have no decided preference in favour of the fashion or quality of British manufactures, and who, by mixing with the mass of the people, will gradually effect a change in their taste.— Already do the Americans begin to complain, that the British manufactures are slighted, and inferior in quality to their usual standard ;— and it is well known, that many of the coarse kinds of stuffs, made at Norwich, Coventry, Spitalfields, and other factories, are shamefully deficient in length, whilst the Dutch, Flemish, and French, usually give a generous surplus in their measures.

But if the assertions of Lord Sheffield were founded on truth, what should be the conduct of Great Britain ?

Surely no circumstance can be more favourable to the aggrandizing a nation of industry, than the possession of a foreign trade with a country, which does not supply its own wants, and in which, the consumers of manufactures, that she furnishes, are continually increasing.

Surrounded by rival nations, whose interests are opposed to hers, does she consider the duties that arise out of such a connection ? They should prompt her to facilitate, by every method in her power the means of making remittances, in return for the manufactures she furnished ; not by prohibiting the sale of American vessels which are sent to England for the payment of British debts ; — by opening her ports for the importation of American produce  
free

free of duty ; — not by laying such heavy impositions thereon, as to oblige the merchant to seek a more friendly market ? and by cultivating an intercourse, pointedly intimate, with that country ; — for this is the vernal season, when the seeds of future connection and intimacy with America are to be sown and cultivated ; — not by showing evident marks of pleasure and satisfaction at every fabricated account of the distresses of America.

It would be unnecessary to follow Lord Sheffield through the tedious detail of articles that he has enumerated, as constituting the wants of the Americans, the greatest part of which, he asserts, they must absolutely procure from England ; — the fallacy of this account can only be discovered by a person who is acquainted with the nature of the American trade, and the relative quality and price of foreign manufactures.

To oppose assertion to assertion, would not be sufficient to operate conviction on the public mind ; — but surely, one who can seriously place the articles of silk, laces, and salt, amongst the number of those which Great Britain can enter into competition with other countries in supplying America with, must either be very ignorant of his subject, or extremely partial to his own country.

On a fair and candid consideration of the foregoing reflections, I think you will be persuaded, that the beautiful prospect that Lord Sheffield has painted to the eyes of his enraptured countrymen, of the increasing consequence of Great Britain, from his pleasing Arcadian plans will without great care taken to prevent it, and by pursuing a system diametrically opposite to what he has formed, disappear, like the dancing vision of a misty evening.

He reasons, as if the trade of America must irresistibly be confined to its former channel ; whereas I can assure him, that freed from the controul of your Navigation Act, and all the fetters of commercial restraint it will expand itself, as far as seas can carry, or winds can waft it.

He forgets the energy of this young Country, that he is devoting to such humiliating restrictions ; — he forgets, that it exhibited, whilst in its cradle, such marks of firmness and vigour of constitution, as like young Hercules to crush the serpent, that wantonly attacked it.

He does not recollect, that it is in the power of the United States, if provoked to it, to have recourse to recrimination and mutually ill offices, and to establish restrictions similar to those Great Britain may impose, which will be relatively far more prejudicial to her trade and commerce.

An impartial dispassionate Englishman, fully weighing the reasons alledged against the adoption of Lord Sheffield's restraining system, and cordially attached to the interest of Great Britain, will deprecate the fatal measure.

An American, in the same temper of mind, looking forward to the future prosperity and power of his country, and contemplating



# 16 STRICTURES ON COMMERCE.

ing the tendency of this system towards strengthening the union of the States, and making it indissoluble, will not hesitate to acquiesce without a murmur, to the existence of these restraining regulations :— the only objections that can arise, will come from those, who, too attentive to temporary inconveniences, do not consider and contrast them, with the many advantages their country will eventually derive ;— who do not consider, that the more trade and intercourse the United States will have with Great Britain, the greater will be the importation of British manufactures, and the more it will tend to impoverish and weaken them, and in the same proportion, contribute to her aggrandizement and power.

*Harley-Street, Cavendish-Square, December 16th, 1783.*

## END OF STRICTURES ON COMMERCE.

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### PREFACE TO MENTOR.

**T**HE Author feels himself constrained to beg his readers indulgence, for the hasty manner, which the scantiness of his time (not being able to devote but three evenings to it) has obliged him to observe in preparing the following address. Indeed this consideration, together with the very different avocations in which he is engaged, and the disinclination he has to controversial writings, would have prevented him from undertaking it, were it not that no one else seemed disposed to do it, and the repeated denials to the importunities of some friends, made the last alternative most disagreeable.

It has been his study to state the thoughts which occurred in so short a time, in as plain and simple a manner as he could, and not to puzzle his honest reader with learned form, or to plague him with frequent quotations from the works of the dead, to shew his own great reading. The case being stated, he supposes his reader competent to judge for himself, without searching the records of antiquity for examples of opinion in like cases.

MENTOR'S

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# MENTOR'S REPLY

T O

## PHOCION'S LETTER.

**R**AISE a feather in the air, and it will be impossible to determine where it shall light so it is with a newly raised political sentiment only granting that there are a few interested, both for and against it, to give it a circulation.

When the letter of Phocion, first made its appearance the doctrines contained in it stood so opposed to common understanding, that I was very far from supposing that any consequences arising from them, would make a reply to the letter in the smallest degree necessary; so far from it, I judged a reply would carry with it, the appearance of wantonly seizing an occasion to introduce the author upon the stage of politics; but experience has taught me that passion, pomp, and plausibility, may pass even upon an enlightened people, for argument and truth.

This author, while he declaims against "heated spirits," and "inflammatory" publications, gives us a striking proof that he has, in an eminent degree, that great disqualification for a statesman an uncontrollable warmth of temper. This letter affords us an instance of the frailty of human nature. It gives us the picture of a strong and tolerably well informed mind, which, perhaps having been flattered by success in the early stage of life, has acquired too much respect for its own capacity, too much contempt for that of others, and too much vanity to conceal these effects.

A statesman should be well informed of the nature of that kind of evidence, which gives political opinion; he would then see the possibility of others having materials to reason from, which the hastiness of his mind may have overlooked. This would teach him the use of holding in decent respect the opinion of others, and of his being a dispassionate enquirer into the means which produced them. I can suppose that Phocion believed himself possessed of an honest warmth; but want of charity and want of modesty, in one who offers himself for public inspection, will never fail to raise some bile against him.

But my business is with the political part of Phocion's Letter, not that which paints the author, and I would apologize for saying this much, if I was not so strongly courted to it by his illiberality. For in writing and acting, I would wish forever to separate the statesman or politician, and the man.



The little regard which Phocion had to method in the arrangement of his arguments, must be my excuse for adopting the same plan. I must take him where the weight of his arguments seem to rest.

First, then to his construction of the treaty ? (which as his pamphlets are in the hands of most of the people, I will not trouble them with a long extract of it here ) I beg leave to oppose to it the construction in one of the publications, under the signature of Gustavus, and leave the public to judge which is fairest.

“ In the 6th article of the treaty it is provided, that no one shall suffer in his person, liberty, or property, on account of the part he may have taken in the war. The 5th article describes the persons provided for, and distinguishes them into three classes: First, those that are real British subjects. The second, those that were within their lines, and had not taken arms against the country. The third class are described by the provision that is made for them, viz. They shall have liberty to go into any part of the United States, for twelve months, to solicit a restoration of their estates that may have been confiscated. This class must be those, who, belonging to America, have taken arms against their country. The first and second class, it is agreed, that Congress shall *recommend* to the states, a restoration of their property. The third it seems were too infamous for the English minister to ask any consideration for, except the wretched privilege of asking it for themselves. But I can find no where, even a request, and that only implied, that any of the three classes may dwell among us, and enjoy the immunities and privileges of citizens ; for the first class are considered as former subjects, the second and third as acquired subjects of England.”

But Phocion starts another difficulty : He says, to imagine, that by espousing the cause of Great Britain, they become aliens, is to admit, that subjects may, at pleasure, renounce their allegiance to the state of which they were members, and devote themselves to a foreign jurisdiction ; “ a principle,” he adds, “ contrary to law, and subversive of government.”

To this I reply, that if there was nothing more in the case than their adhering to the then enemies of our country, I would readily join Phocion in opinion, that this action simply, should not be construed to amount to alienation ; but it should be construed to amount to treason. So, instead of aliens, I would render them traitors, and as such, put the penal laws in force against them.

But it is by treaty, that they become aliens or subjects of England. By the treaty England adopted them as subjects, and by ratifying that treaty, the states, and this state, from the share she had in it, consented to that adoption. And this is the great benefit of the treaty to them, which Phocion says, we would violate ; whereas it appears that we, who he dubs heated and designing men, are the real supporters of it,

Granting

Granting them to be aliens, Phocion continues, they cannot hold real property under our government, their real estates then must be considered as belonging to the public, this is confiscation, and thereby the treaty is violated. I answer, that they are aliens, but aliens stipulated for. If in doing this, our ministers have exceeded the powers given them, and Congress also, by acceding to what they have done; or, if they agreed to an article in the treaty, which wars with the nature of government or with the particular genius of ours, let it be so declared, and also the consequence of the blunder; then we may take up the subject in another point of view. But till then we must consider it as it is, and take it for granted that it is right.

But for my own part, I cannot see the inconsistency of it. Suppose the British East India company had claims to certain lands in America, before her separation from England, and by an article of the treaty it should be agreed, that they should have the privilege of selling it, some might doubt the justice of it, but I think none could doubt the right.

To make it appear, that in removing a number of these people, prosecutions of some kind or other would be necessary, and which are forbid by the treaty, seems to be a chief design of Phocion. Beside others which have been observed, he starts this: How will it be determined, but by prosecution, who have so adhered to the enemy, as in a legal sense to amount to a crime? I answer, in the first place, that no question of law arises on the subject.

It is by treaty, and not by law, that we are to judge of them; for the ratification of that has, in effect, repealed all the laws that stood in force against them. If the treaty have not this power, then have we played the cheat, not only with England, but with every power that was represented in that Congress, which settled the terms of peace. In the second place, that the treaty itself makes the distinction that otherwise would be wanting; and all that is necessary for the legislature in this particular is, by an act of grace to make a distinction of a very different kind; to distinguish and restore to citizenship, the deserving of those who are by treaty made subjects of England.

I presume it must by this time clearly appear, that the people we are speaking of are the subjects of England. It then remains to see, what necessity demands, and what justice and honour will allow to be done with them; and in this investigation, let us throw aside every passion, but that which is concerned for the safety and true interest of the state.

Before I proceed, permit me to lay it down as a maxim, that it is a principle coincident with the very nature of society, that there be a power vested in it, in some form or other, adequate to the purpose, not only of correcting any present evil in it, but to prevent a probable future one.

Though



Though I abhor all reasonings which tend to make less heinous the dreadful sin of taking arms against our country, both as it regards the eternal law of justice, and also good policy; yet as the country has agreed by a solemn compact, not to take vengeance of those of this character in America, both our honour and interest are concerned to preserve this compact inviolate, so upon this occasion I shall dismiss all that passion arising from a lively recollection of what this country has sustained from them, would dictate, and speak of them only as they respect our political safety, as a morbid humour in our political body, which requires healthy remedies to expel.

After a farmer has prepared his ground, would he mix cockle with his seed-wheat to grow up with, and contaminate the wholesome grain? In establishing a young empire, should we leave the principle of sedition in its foundation? But Phocion will tell us that this is a bug-bear danger. *Make it their interest and they will be good subjects.* God forbid, the government should make it their interest to be its friends; for to do this, would be to bring the principles of the government to suit *them*, not them to suit *it*. The tory principle, where it has been long entertained, and where it has long beat unison with the passions, is more fixed and immovable than the best established government. I speak of those who have been much concerned in government speculation. Of political opinions, those which respect monarchical and republican governments, are most opposed of course most irreconcilable; they beget a contempt for each other, in the members of the two governments.

To show that our fears for the well-being of our government on this occasion, are founded in reason, and not ideal, beside what has been already said, let us consider the number and quality of the people, who, I am ashamed to say, are the subjects of dispute, and the difference between the government which their principles contend for, and ours.

In a monarchical government, I grant the doctrine of Phocion may obtain. Their fear might make it their interest to be good subjects; the fear of offending against the government. But, in a republican government, the people are their own governors. A republican government must take its shape from the opinion of the people, and is variable, as the opinions of its component parts may vary; hence the necessity of correcting that evil, which may spring from a corruption of opinion, and though it may be confined to a few at first, it may communicate to the overturning of the government. The number of those who are in reality malcontents in America, are not so small as may be imagined; nor are their views and hopes so humble as many suppose.

I have said that government has a right to anticipate probable evils. The tory principle contains in it a mortal and irreconcilable hatred to our government. That this principle will be communicated, is too probable, when we consider the wealth,  
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the art, the perseverance and fashion of many of its present possessors.

On the other hand, let us consider the indigence which the ravages of a long and accursed war have created in the other party, which must cause them assiduously to attend to their own private concerns. For though some of them still preserve a lively attention to the government, yet in many the effect which I have mentioned, has been wrought; and in a little time the last spasms of the republican spirit will be over, the meager ghost of poverty with all her train of evils, being constantly before them, every other consideration will yield to the spur of necessity. In the meanwhile, the mal-contents are left with the means, and can afford the leisure to get into administration. This, fellow citizens is the condition of affairs; — I blush to proclaim it, to which the writings and sayings of whigs tend to bring you! — For Phocion tells you, that he has been an eminent servant of the republic in establishing her independency. If a revolution is effected in the manner above stated, however infamous the means, yet when the revolution is compleated, it is a just one, because it must be supposed that a majority of opinions are for it. Therefore I say, it is importantly the duty of the present government to anticipate such an evil, by removing the causes of pravity of opinion. But short of a revolution, a perversion of the principles of our government, which is more easily wrought, may be as wounding to the upright republican.

With regard to England's renewing her claim to the country, on the supposition that ill policy abroad, and anarchy at home, should invite her to it, I am clearly of opinion it would not be her interest to do it; for, if she should succeed, the extent and rapid growth of the country would prevent its being long tributary to that distant island. I am also fully convinced, that the late and present ministry of England did not, and do not, wish for the re-union of the country upon any other terms than as a farm, from which she is to derive *substantial revenue*, without allowing the tenant any vote in the disposition of it. But we are not to calculate what is only the real interest of a nation, whose monarch has the right of making peace and war. Suppose the inclination of the present king should not lead him to reclaim the country; yet, his son, when he comes to the throne, may be ambitious for the glory of recovering the lost dominion of his father. And as to the difficulty of obtaining money from parliament to carry on an unreasonable war, the rapid corruption of that people will probably soon remove it.

There is no other way of preventing this probable corruption of opinion, but by removing the cause, which I have asserted to be the mal-contents of America. Having, as we presume, shewn the necessity, let us now, as proposed, enquire if honour and equity will consent to the measure.

The treaty which justice and honour forbid us to violate, does  
not



not, even upon so liberal a construction, as I believe Phocion himself would give it, debar the states from making laws that may be salutary to the government, and advantageous to the people, though in their consequences they may operate against the interest of the subjects of England. Suppose a line to be drawn, and the deserving of those, who by treaty are made subjects of England, should be re-adopted, and invested with all the privileges of citizens; and, after this, laws should be passed, giving the citizens the exclusive benefits of trade. This law would operate no more against the subjects of England that are here, than against those who are at home, except in this, the effect of the law in one case, sends these home, and in the other case, keeps them there, or rather prevents their coming here as traders.

There was a time when the people of England considered themselves in danger from a corruption of opinion of another kind — I mean of religious opinion. Few protestants complained of it as unjust or dishonourable, that the government enacted laws to suppress the growth of the Roman Catholic religion.

A government has a clearer right to interfere in checking the promulgation of depravity in political, than in religious opinion. If the tory principle should be repressed in this way, it is a remedy used for the health and preservation of the body politic, and as such no one, not even the tories, can complain of it as unjust, though they may deprecate the hardship of the measure as applied to themselves.

In the first case, that is against laws for exclusive trade, it has been objected, that by removing these people we remove a great part of the silver, and gold out of the state. With as much propriety it may be argued against the measure, that we should remove a great part of the writing paper out of the state.

Money is a convenience, not an article of trade; being such, wherever trade centers money will. The importance of this city, as a place of trade, is not owing to the quantity of money that is now in it, or that ever was in it, at any one time. It is with effects that we trade, and the mercantile consequence of this town arises from its being central to the effects of this and the adjoining states, and the convenience of its water communication. Suppose this city traded only with the effects of this state, then its quantity of trade would be in exact proportion to the annual produce of the state, though there should not be an ounce of silver or gold in the place to-morrow.

Another objection still more futile has been made against a law for exclusive trade. That we prevent the merchants of England from coming over and settling with us, and their ships from visiting us, which would be a dreadful misfortune to the trading interest of the state. "Open your arms, or ports," (I do not remember which) said the writer of a hand bill, "to the ships of foreign nations."

Unless Congress should have in contemplation to give some particular privileges to the French nation, and to which I shall have no objection,

objection, I declare I have not a wish ever to see a foreign vessel, or a foreign merchant, visit this continent, except as a traveller. I would not be understood to wish a prohibition of foreign vessels to our harbours; but I wish they may be discouraged, by encouraging ship-building here. With us, who have it in our power to make vessels and naval stores, articles of export; and who want articles of export so much, would it be to our interest to carry on our trade in foreign bottoms? — With regard to foreign merchants, it is well known that there are, at present, more adventurers in trade, in America, than there is trade to support, *that is*, the spirit of trade is more than in proportion to its quantity. When foreign merchants migrate to the two Americas, it is generally with a view to mend or make their fortunes, and to return home and enjoy them. Can such men feel themselves interested in the welfare of our government? Is it not more probable that they will still consider themselves of the nation which they left; and as far as they have influence in the government, use it for the interest of their own nation, to which they still feel themselves belonging? Would it then be so essentially our duty to encourage such settlers to supplant our own traders; and who, if they acquire fortunes, is it probable they will be used to the benefit of our government?

There is a kind of settlers that I could wish might be encouraged from all countries; these are husbandmen and manufacturers. When these migrate, they do it with a view to remain where they settle. Beside these, scientific men of all kinds should be encouraged to visit us. For, whether they become permanent residents or not, they are useful while they do stay.

I would encourage husbandmen and manufacturers to come to the country, and discourage traders, for the same reason that I would encourage articles of export, and discourage articles of import, by holding out bounties on the one side, and imposts on the other.

So general is the cry of the balance of trade being against America, that the blockhead who wants skill to balance his cane, will put on the face of business, and tell me, “the balance of trade is against us.” Will importing foreign merchants into the country tend to place this balance in its favour. The truth is, a balance of trade cannot exist against a country longer than a year or two. For if the imports of this year exceed the exports, the balance must be paid the next year. If the articles of export should not be so increased, as by the next year to make up the balance, then the articles of import will be proportionably diminished. A balance cannot be always due. The imports and exports must, in the long run, bear an exact proportion to each other. If our exports are small, our imports must consequently be small.

The nation then cannot abound in foreign productions; they cannot be in a state of affluence,

This teaches us a plain and simple truth, viz. That the riches of a nation are derived from the cultivation of its land, and its manufactures



## 24 MENTOR'S REPLY &c.

manufacturies. Merchants are the agents of the farmers and manufacturers, to exchange their commodities for those of other countries, which this will not produce.

This is a simple state of the case; I wish I had leisure to enter more fully into it.

To increase the wealth of our state then, we should invite husbandmen and manufacturers into the country, and look coldly on traders, for that part of our community is already too numerous, and will probably cause the temporary inconvenience which I have mentioned, of placing the balance of trade against us for a time, which must create a scarcity of foreign commodities for some time after. Unless greater exertions in cultivating the land should immediately succeed it and make up the balance.

Phocion's letter being essentially, though not minutely answered, some of his arguments which are not noticed, depending upon principles which have been disproved, some not applying at all to the case in question, and some in reality unexceptionable, I will take leave of my reader, after observing, that I do not wish the policy of the state to take into consideration the small sinner from the ignorant. Our government is in no danger: It is the bell-weather of the flock that we should guard against.

There is no form of government so delicate in its nature, and which requires so much attention to preserve, as that which exists in the minds of the people. While corruption is kept out of it, there is no form of government so honourable to men, and so happy to the partaker of it; and when corrupted, there is no government so much to be detested and avoided. Considering things in this point of view, and considering what it has cost us to establish this government, what it would have cost us if we had failed in it, I am not willing to trifle with the acquisition. To risque it from a false notion of generosity, or because it is easy for Phocion and others to bestow the epithet of vindictive on the salutary measures that may be proposed for its preservation.

We did at the commencement of the war, and have in the whole course of it, kept it in view as a debt which we owed to posterity, to bequeath to them that liberty which we received from our ancestors. Having got this in our power by an hazardous and dreadful conflict, to suffer the inestimable acquisition to perish by neglect, would be not only to betray them but ourselves.

THE END OF MENTOR'S REPLY.

Philadelphia March 30th. 1784

MEMORANDUM. Every Gentleman that has been supplied with these two Pamphlets in their present imperfect situation, are requested to be so very obliging as to call for their completion at BELL'S BOOK-STORE, near St. Paul's Church, in Third-Street, as soon as they are Advertised, and the favour will be gratefully acknowledged, By their respectful Servant,

ROBERT BELL.